INTRODUCTION: WHY A MEN’S SEDER?

“When I sit down in a public place, beside a swimming pool, or at a park, I relax and feel good if there is no one else around. If another man arrives, I first run a check that he is no physical threat – that he is not about to mug me. No one has ever mugged me or hurt me or even picked a fight with me since 4th grade, but the feeling is there. Then I get to assessing whether he is stronger, has better clothes, or is more athletic, in better shape, how do I match up? If he has a woman with him, I try to figure out what she sees in him, if she is good looking I question her motivation. If the parking lot is within view, I check out his car for comparison with my own. Even if he is friendly and a conversation starts, I have to fight the urge to mention my achievements, what an important person I am – to subtly start winning the contest. In inner competition never stops – I seem caught in a basically hostile and insecure obsession with comparisons.” Source: Manhood: An Action Plan for Changing Men's Lives by Steve Biddulph 1995

Tonight, this Seder is about retraining ourselves to change this damaging and isolating pattern. Teaching ourselves to see other men as brothers, tonight we are searching for our brothers, tonight we are safe in the company of men, tonight we are our brother’s keeper. Together as Jewish men we strive to free ourselves from the thoughts and practices that enslave us and to embody the blessing:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has made me to be a free man.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁעָשַׂנִי בֶּן חוֹרִין.

Baruch ata Adonai elohënu melech ha-olam she-asani ben horin.

The Four Questions

מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלֵּילוֹת?

Why is this night different from all other nights?

- Why is it that because I am a Man I have to be the bread winner?
- Why was it so much easier to make friends when I was growing up?
- Why is it so important to me that I am still able to compete athletically at the same level I did when I was a teenager, even though my doctors and body tell me I can't?
- Why is it that no matter how old I get, I don't understand women?

The Four Questions from the Traditional Seder do not change from year to year, but each year we come with new questions. Take an index card from the stack on the table and write the question you brought to <u>this Seder</u> this year? Place the card in middle of the Seder Plate.

Slaves to Technology

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev once observed a man hurrying along the street, look neither right nor left:

> *Why are you rushing so? He asked him. I am after my livelihood, the man replied. And how do you know, continued the rabbi, that your livelihood is running on before you, so that you have to rush after it? Perhaps it is behind you, and all you need do to encounter it is to stand still.*

Machines that were designed to care for us force us to care for them. Timesaving gadgets ring and beep, and we jump to do their bidding. Now that bodies, possessions and ideas travel faster than ever, our accessories turn us into their appendages, and the old struggle between person and creation grows ever more intense.
(Rabbi Dennis Ross: God in Our Relationships: Spirituality Between People from the Teachings of Martin Buber)

If you have a cellphone or pager take a moment to turn it off. How does it feel to be freed from this device? If you can't you can't turn it off because of some obligation to always be reachable by your work, your spouse, your family when, if ever, do you feel free? Take a moment and share your reflections with the person to your left.

The Torah speaks of four men: a wise man, a conflicted man, a simple man, and one who is not able to ask a question.

The wise man asks: "What is the meaning of my life? For what do I live"

Write on a card what gives your life the most meaning and purpose.

Collect the cards, shuffle them and redistribute them around the table and read the answer on each card.

The conflicted man asks: "What does this service to my aging parents mean to me? And what claim do my children have on me? And how do my responsibilities to my parents affect my responsibilities to my children?"

Write on a card what have you found to be the key to balancing the demands of being a son & being a father?

Collect the cards, shuffle them and redistribute them around the table and read the answer on each card.

The simple man asks: "Why am I here? Why did I come to a Men's Seder anyway, what am I hoping to get out of this experience?"

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרָיִם.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, not in control of our time or our labor, not masters of our destiny. And we are slaves even now to our modern day Pharoahs.

Discuss: What enslaves you most as a man? What would need to change in your life to move you closer to freedom?

Avadim ha-yinu, ha-yinu,
Ata b'në chorin, b'në chorin.
Avadim ha-yinu, ata, ata b'në chorin.
Avadim ha-yinu, ata, ata b'në chorin, b'në chorin.

בָּרוּךְ הַמָּקוֹם. בָּרוּךְ הוּא.

TO THINK ABOUT:
"For this is the journey that men make, to find themselves. If they fail in this, it doesn't matter much what else they find. Money, fame, position, many loves, revenge—all are of little consequence. And when the tickets are collected at the end of the ride they are tossed into a bin marked failure. But if a man happens to find himself—if he knows what he can be depended upon to do, the limits of his courage, the position from which he will no longer retreat … the extent of his dedication … then he has found a mansion which he can inhabit with dignity all the days of his life."
(James Michner, 'The Fires of Spring")

These are the Ten Plagues which the Holy One, blessed be He, thought to bring most devastatingly upon men. Each gender has its plagues; these are ours.

Beat your drum following the rhythm of the syllables of these plagues:

Prostate Cancer.
Heart Disease.
Diabetes.
Weight Gain.
Hair Loss.
Job Loss.
Impotence.
Arthritis.
Substance Abuse.
Premature Death.

Now find a rhythm that is comfortable for you. Add to this list with additional Plagues that beset us as Men, when you have a plague to add to the list call it out.

God has bestowed many blessings upon us.

What are the blessings in your life?

Take a card and make a list of the blessings you enjoy in life (these will not be shared). Place it in your pocket.

Write on a card why you came to this Seder and what you hope to get from it.

Collect the cards, shuffle them and redistribute them around the table and read the answer on each card.

For the one who is unable to ask

you must open up the subject to him, as it is written: "You shall tell your son on that day:..." What advice do you wish you had been given 20 or 30 years ago when you were just starting out as an adult man?

Write on the card the advice you wish you were given.

Collect the cards, shuffle them and redistribute them around the table and read the answer on each card.

On Being A Friend:
Be first to greet your fellow man; invite him to your joyful occasions; call him by complimentary names; never give away his secrets; help him when he is in trouble; look after his interests when he is away; overlook his shortcomings and forgive him promptly; criticize him when he has done wrong; respect him always; do not deceive him; do not lie to him; pray for him and wish him happiness; attend to his burial if he dies.
--Menorat ha-Maor